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New York

President:	Mr. Ettalhi	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Muharemi
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Johnston
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 21 January 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/31)

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08-21448 (E)

The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of Egypt wishes to express to you, Sir, and to the other members of the Security Council its appreciation for your prompt response to the request of the Group of Arab States to convene this emergency meeting to consider the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, resulting from the cruel punitive measures that Israel insists on imposing on the Palestinian people in blatant breach of its commitments and obligations pursuant to international law and international humanitarian law, especially its commitments as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

Egypt supports the statement made by the representative of Saudi Arabia, Chairman of the Arab Group for this month, and the statements to be made by the representatives of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, all of which reflect the unanimity of the international condemnation of Israel's systematic violations of international law and obligations.

Egypt stresses its legal and political position against these unlawful and inhumane Israeli measures, and it calls today upon the Security Council and the entire international community to take all necessary measures to end the Israeli policies of closure, siege and the cutting off of food and fuel supplies, to ensure respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people and to enable that people to live a dignified life, without discrimination between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, because the Palestinians in both areas constitute one people.

We have all witnessed with deep sorrow the scenes resulting from those Israeli policies and measures, which contravene all international norms and all the obligations of the occupying Power. These include policies of siege and the closure of all crossing points, resulting in a lack of food and medical supplies; the cutting off of electricity; the halting of services in hospitals and bakeries; and the withholding of heating supplies during harsh weather conditions. These measures have also affected the water supply and sewage system, posing the threat that diseases and epidemics will spread.

Moreover, our sorrow increases as we see our brethren living in the harsh conditions imposed by the occupying Power and facing repeated attacks by the occupying Israeli army resulting — over the past two days alone — in no fewer than 40 Palestinian deaths and hundreds of casualties.

As part of Egypt's endeavours to deal effectively with the humanitarian crisis on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza, during a series of contacts with both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence of Israel, President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak called for the immediate cessation of those punitive measures and for all measures necessary to ease the suffering of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. He also asked for assurances that Israel would not repeat such measures, which undermine all international efforts aimed at establishing a viable independent Palestinian State, through the negotiation process that began following the Annapolis Conference. That process is now in jeopardy due to the deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In parallel, Egypt intensified its contacts at the highest level with the international Quartet, which should shoulder greater responsibility in addressing the deteriorating situation in Gaza and in ensuring that such a situation never occurs again. Egypt also made contact at the highest level with the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah and with other influential international Powers interested in continuing the Middle East peace process on the basis of international legitimacy and full respect for all mutual commitments on the part of both the Palestinian and the Israeli sides, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

While Egypt fully rejects the launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, we stress the importance of Israel respecting international law and its obligations as an occupying Power in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, primarily its obligation to respect the human rights of the Palestinian people. The humanitarian disaster that the Palestinians are currently experiencing must not be allowed to fuel the vicious cycle of violence, thus

undermining the positive spirit aimed at reaching a peaceful and just settlement.

The Israeli Government's illegal decision to name Gaza a "hostile entity" is an additional contravention of international law and aims at discriminating against the Palestinian people on an illegal and illegitimate basis.

Despite the success of Egyptian and other international endeavours to ensure that electricity is restored to northern Gaza and to begin partial fuel deliveries to the Strip, and despite Egypt's ongoing commitment to provide electricity to the Rafah area of southern Gaza, the Security Council must still fulfil its responsibility to lift the siege imposed on the Palestinian people and to ensure access for humanitarian assistance through all crossings, as this is necessary to enable the Palestinian people to return to normal life, both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It must also prevent Israel from violating the rights of the Palestinian people through repeated assaults that kill Palestinians and destroy all hope for peace in the Middle East. Egypt is looking forward to the Security Council immediately adopting the measures necessary to ensure that such violations will not recur.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak at this meeting on behalf of the members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, and Libya on your impressive work as President of the Council for the month of January.

The members of the Non-Aligned Movement condemn the recent attacks by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the death of 19 Palestinians and the serious wounding of 50 others, as well as in widespread destruction of civilian property and farmlands. The situation is of grave concern to the NAM, because Israel's illegal actions have caused the death of more than 150 Palestinian civilians, including children and women, during the past month and half.

This violent military escalation by Israel constitutes a grave breach of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. It fuels the cycle of violence and threatens international peace and security as well as the fragile peace process between the two sides. Moreover, such actions exacerbate the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, where the civilian population continues to be collectively punished under a crippling occupation.

Israel, the occupying Power, has intensified its closure of the occupied Palestinian territories by hermetically sealing all border crossings, preventing even the delivery of food supplies to the population since Friday, 18 January 2008. At the same time, Israel has persisted with the reduction of fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip, completely cutting off fuel to the main power plant on Sunday, 20 January 2008.

Such illegal measures of collective punishment threaten to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis and are hastening the deterioration of the situation on the ground in all its aspects. The suspension of fuel supplies has affected the provision of electricity to the civilian population.

Israel should be called upon to lift the closures and open the crossings to permit access, at the very minimum, for necessary food and medical supplies. Immediate action must be taken to ensure the entry of essential supplies and the restoration of fuel to the Gaza Strip.

The Non-Aligned Movement calls upon the international community, especially the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities and to urge Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its violations immediately and to comply with its obligations under international law and relevant United Nations resolutions as the occupying Power in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its solidarity with the Palestinian people during this critical period and reaffirms its long-standing positions of principle. It calls, inter alia, for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory and other Arab lands occupied since 1967 and the establishment of a State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Ms. Štiglic (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the

Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, and the countries of the European Free Trade Association Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, align themselves with this declaration.

The European Union is deeply concerned about recent violence affecting Gaza and communities in southern Israel. While recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, the EU calls for an immediate end to all acts of violence, including the continued firing of rockets into Israeli territory, and to all activities that are contrary to international law and endanger civilians.

The EU reiterates its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for the continuous provision of essential services, including fuel and power supplies. The EU once again calls on all parties to allow unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza and to work urgently for the opening of crossings to goods and people.

The EU welcomes the commencement of negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian officials on all outstanding issues — including all final-status issues — with a view to concluding a peace agreement before the end of 2008, as agreed in Annapolis last November. The EU reaffirms that this is a crucial opportunity for regional and international partners to effectively support a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In that context, the EU calls for continued broad and constructive involvement by Arab partners, building on the Arab Peace Initiative.

The European Union urges the parties to implement their Road Map obligations in parallel to their negotiations. The goal remains the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza that will unite all Palestinians, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. Recent settlement activity constitutes another EU concern in that context, as it represents a major obstacle to peace. The EU reiterates that the Road Map is unambiguous in that regard.

The EU is firmly committed to remaining actively involved in order to support the parties' efforts to keep the negotiations on track, working closely with other members of the Quartet and partners in the region. The EU remains determined to contribute significantly to this effort, as laid down in its Action Strategy, "State-building for Peace in the Middle East", which covers the broad range of its assistance activities.

The EU welcomes the results of last December's international donors conference for the Palestinian State — namely, more than $7.4 billion in pledges — and calls on all donors to deliver on their pledges, in support of efforts to build the future Palestinian State in accordance with the reform and development plan presented by Prime Minister Fayyad. In that context, the EU recalls the utmost importance of full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access. The EU is committed to providing substantial financial support for the Palestinian people and to working out the means to do so. In that context, the EU continues to support the work of Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate once again the European Union's concern at the surge of violence in and around Gaza. The EU calls on all the parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to refrain from the use of force. The EU appeals to all sides, for calm, particularly at this time of renewal of the political process.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Amil (Pakistan): On behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for responding to the calls for the holding of this emergency meeting of the Security Council to consider the grave humanitarian situation prevailing in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular the Gaza Strip.

In the wake of the high hopes for peace rekindled by the Annapolis Conference in November, the strong support pledged for the future Palestinian State at the international donors conference held in Paris in December and the recent high-level diplomacy in the region, the international community had nurtured strong expectations for progress on the path of peace in the region. It expected to receive some encouraging feedback on the negotiation process launched in Annapolis. On the ground, we expected to see respite from the human rights violations and atrocities committed by Israel in the occupied territories, alleviation of the suffering of the Palestinian people

and tangible improvement in their living conditions. Regrettably, those hopes continue to elude us.

On the contrary, we are faced once again with spiralling violence and further deterioration of an already fragile humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the Gaza Strip. The recent intensified military campaign and indiscriminate use of force by Israel in Gaza have terrorized the civilian population there and have resulted in gross human rights violations and the deaths of more than 40 Palestinians, including several children and women, during the past few days, in addition to injuries to scores of others and the widespread destruction of infrastructure, civilian property, farmlands and orchards. At the same time, Israel's continuing military incursions and its campaign of arrests in the West Bank — particularly the recent raids in Nablus — are also undermining the security efforts of the Palestinian Authority.

In addition, the gravity of the situation necessitated the convening of an emergency session of the Human Rights Council to call for urgent international action to put an immediate end to these grave violations by Israel and for protection of the Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory, in compliance with human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. We urge all concerned parties to respect the rules of international humanitarian law and to refrain from violence against the civilian population.

Israel's closure of the Gaza crossing points — cutting off the delivery of humanitarian assistance, fuel and electricity supplies and other essential medical and relief items — is entirely unacceptable. We share the international concern in that regard, and we call for an immediate end to the brutal siege of the Gaza Strip by Israel.

Nothing can justify this kind of behaviour and unlawful action by Israel. This escalation by Israel — coming on the heels of its decision to press ahead with the construction of new settlements on Palestinian lands, in defiance of its Road Map obligations and international opinion — is a serious blow to confidence-building and good faith, which are so essential for an environment conducive to negotiations. The construction of the illegal separation wall also continues unabated. The impunity enjoyed by Israel is a major factor in the incitement of the desperate reactions and the cycle of violence that have bedevilled the peace efforts.

The international community must not allow Israel to undermine the nascent peace process, in which precious time, efforts and resources have been invested. The United States, as the guarantor of the Annapolis understanding, has a particular obligation in this regard. Nevertheless, the primary responsibility rests with the United Nations and the Security Council, which must fulfil its Charter responsibilities. We call on the Council to take immediate measures to address the situation. We must make every effort to contain the damage caused by the recent events and to help the parties to get back firmly on the path of dialogue and peaceful settlement.

The following steps are vital in order to ameliorate the situation in the short term and to ensure success in the long term.

There must be an immediate cessation of military campaigns by Israel and an end to all violence by all parties. A rapid and tangible improvement in the situation on the ground in the occupied territories, is needed, as is an end to collective punishment, a prisoners release, a removal of all kinds of blockades and restrictions and an immediate end to the siege of Gaza. There must be an end to policies and actions by Israel that seek to change the realities on the ground that could prejudice a final settlement, including the integrity and viability of the future Palestinian State. This includes, inter alia, a halt to the construction of the illegal separation wall, a freeze of all settlement activity and the dismantling of unauthorized settler outposts. There must be immediate and unfettered provision of adequate humanitarian assistance and of all essential goods and services in the occupied territories, as well as enhanced economic and social support from the international community. Support must be provided to the Palestinian Authority for building State institutions, including the security apparatus. Finally, efforts must be made to revive intra-Palestinian unity.

The root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories. Human rights violations and recurring humanitarian crises are the direct consequences of the continuing occupation. An end to the occupation of all Arab territories is therefore a necessary prerequisite for peace. The OIC calls for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting

peace based on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. These resolutions require Israel's complete withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and all other occupied Arab territories, including the Golan and the Lebanese lands; the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent and viable State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital; and a just resolution to the plight of the Palestinian refugees.

The participation of the Islamic countries in the Annapolis Conference in response to the invitation from the United States was solely to indicate their commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine and in the Middle East. We welcome the commitment to the establishment of the Palestinian State and the agreement to start final status negotiations to resolve all core issues, including borders, refugees, settlements and Jerusalem.

To be fair, these issues must be resolved on the basis of previous agreements, especially the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid Peace Conference terms of reference, the Quartet's Road Map, and the Arab Peace Initiative. This approach will entail Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We hope a peace treaty will be finalized before the end of 2008 and then be implemented quickly and earnestly.

A just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine is our collective objective and strategic imperative. It would have a positive impact on regional and international peace and security. Its early realization would require the full support and commitment of the entire international community. The Organization of the Islamic Conference will play its rightful role in this collective endeavour.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. It is my hope that your wisdom and experience will inspire the Council to live up to its great responsibilities. I would like also to express our appreciation to the Italian delegation for its presidency of the Council last month. Allow me also to extend my thanks to Mr. Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing. I stress also that the Lebanese delegation endorses the statement made by the representative of Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

I will start by listing the names of some of the "terrorists" whom Israel has killed in the Gaza Strip: Amir al-Yaziji, 8 years old; Sara Sliman Abu Ghazaal, 8 years old; Mahmoud Moussa Abu Ghazaal, 8 years old; Fady Mansour Al-kafarna, 10 years old. This is not an exhaustive list of those killed, but merely a few killed during the last several days and months of the latest Israeli aggression in Gaza. They have now joined the roster of "terrorists" who have been killed by Israel. They have joined Aiya Al-Asdar, 8 years old; Mohammad Amin, 6 years old; Nasr Allah Abu Salima, 5 years old; and many others.

That is indeed but a sample of the victims of the punishment imposed by Israel on the population of the Gaza Strip on the pretext that the regime there is hostile to it. And killing is only one part of the last two years of continuous and escalating punishment involving siege, isolation, starvation and impoverishment, none of which makes a distinction between those who are armed and those who are civilians, or between the old and the young, or between the healthy and the sick.

Once Israel had worn Gaza down with its strangulating siege, by which it restricted the mobility of individuals and goods, it declared Gaza a "hostile entity" and prohibited the delivery of fuel, gas, medical supplies and food to the territory. In so doing, Israel plunged Gaza into darkness, and brought it to the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe, despite the warnings of this Organization.

It is unacceptable to the human conscience to see scores of people dying because they cannot find enough bread to eat, or because they are too ill or unable to find cars to move them to hospitals — or because if they are moved, the hospitals do not have the capacity to provide proper treatment.

Even those who have been killed are not spared punishment. The situation is so bad that the spokesman for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Christopher Gunness, has said that the Palestinians cannot even find the cement to make graves for the dead.

This is the policy of collective punishment practised by Israel against the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip through a clear decision. Israel threatens to continue this policy despite the announcement of a partial lifting of the siege. Yesterday, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, said, "We are trying to hit only those involved in terrorism, but also signalling to the population in Gaza that it cannot be free from responsibility for the situation".

This policy constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, in particular the regime for the protection of civilians enshrined in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Specifically, article 33 of the Convention explicitly states that

> "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited.
>
> "Pillage is prohibited.
>
> "Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited."

The same rules are set forth in article 50 of The Hague Rules of War and Occupation of 1907. Furthermore, in its explanation of aspects of article 33, the International Committee of the Red Cross condemned collective punishment because it punishes both the guilty and the innocent equally and because it contradicts all humanitarian concepts and notions of justice.

There are some who might say that Israel has the right to defend itself or some justification for the crimes it commits. But this right to self-defence, which is established by international norms and conventions, in particular the Charter of the United Nations, is a right that cannot be used as a pretext to wage war or exact revenge against innocent civilians. In any case, it is a right that does not permit the excessive or disproportionate use of force — which is what is taking place in Gaza today.

It is no coincidence that Mr. John Dugard, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in a statement he issued on 18 January from the United Nations Office at Geneva, stated that

> "Recent action violates the strict prohibition on collective punishment contained in the Fourth Geneva Convention. It also violates one of the basic principles of international humanitarian law that military action must distinguish between military targets and civilian targets... Those responsible for such cowardly action are guilty of serious war crimes and should be prosecuted and punished for their crimes".

Some might say that Israel has ended its occupation of the Gaza Strip. This is true: Israel has withdrawn its forces from the Gaza Strip and dismantled its settlements there. But it has kept its stranglehold on the arteries of life in the Strip. It controls the land, sea and airspace of the Gaza Strip, and controls the daily life of its population. Thus, Gaza can clearly and unambiguously be described as the largest prison in the world.

It is true that Israel's crimes in Gaza did not start with the siege. These are continuing, escalating crimes against the population of the Gaza Strip. The majority of the population are the victims of a policy of displacement and expulsion which coincided with the establishment of the State of Israel.

Let us recall that more than two thirds of the population of the Gaza Strip — around 70 per cent — is comprised of refugees with no clear address in their own land, save those of the refugee camps of Jabalia, Shati, Nuseirat, Deir el-Balah, Maghazi, Khan Younis, Rafah and Bureij. All are addresses targeted by Israel, just as the terrorist organizations Haganah, the Stern Gang and the Irgun targeted the original addresses of the camps in southern Palestine in 1948 with massacres and campaigns of intimidations to force residents to flee Palestine. Those addresses are today part of Israel, as are Asdood, Fallujah, Yasoor, Kalkabbah, Beer Al-Saba'a and hundreds of other villages and towns.

The crimes are continuing to escalate. We will not pose the question: Until when? The duty of the international community is to save the Gaza Strip and its population immediately from all forms of collective punishment imposed by Israel. That is the only option. That is a decision we must take if we are to fulfil the hope of achieving just and comprehensive peace in the region, instead of burying it piece by piece with every child buried.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the sisterly country of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on its election to the Security Council and on the great trust that Member States have placed in it. I should also like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I wish you every success in your new responsibilities. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of the friendly country of Italy for his excellent leadership of the Council in December.

When a given issue is put before the Security Council on an urgent basis it is because that issue has been, as it were, admitted to the intensive care unit. That is precisely the case today. Israel's escalation of military aggression and its collective siege against the Palestinian people in Gaza, which reminds us of dark chapters of humankind's history, both require the urgent attention of the Security Council. The Council must act in a manner that will serve to restore the trust of the international community in the rule of law in a way that does not exclude anyone. The Council must also protect the unarmed Palestinian people against the irresponsible Israeli war machine. In so doing, the Council would foster the desire of peoples for peace.

Israel's decision to declare the Gaza Strip a hostile entity constitutes a unilateral interpretation of international law that has been rejected as riding roughshod over the principles of international law, which hold that collective punishment is a war crime. Israel must be held accountable for that crime and bear its legal and political consequences. Israel's irresponsible decision gives free reign to its occupying forces in occupied Palestinian territory to commit war crimes against the unarmed Palestinian people, implement its policy of collective siege, continue its assassinations and closures of crossing points, establish hundreds of military checkpoints and cut off electricity, fuel, food and medical supplies from the residents of the entire Gaza Strip.

Israel's claim that it has withdrawn from Gaza is a blatant distortion of the facts. Israel controls international borders and all crossing points. It violates Gaza hourly. It controls the flow of food, medicines, water and electricity. In short, Israel, the occupying Power, as defined under international law, has transformed Gaza into a sealed ghetto and the West Bank into besieged bantustans.

It is self-evident that Israel would not have dared to commit those inhuman violations, continue to violate international law, persevere in its defiance of international public opinion and move ahead with its feverish quest to undermine the already shaky peace process in the Middle East, had it not been for the huge vacuum in terms of commitment on the part of influential countries vis-à-vis the launch of a genuine peace process to establish a just and comprehensive peace, in accordance with the well-known international terms of reference. Its obstinacy is also due to the lack of active pressure on Israel to abide by its legal obligations under the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention and international humanitarian law.

The Security Council and the international community must break out of their impotence and paralysis and deter Israel from its bloody policies. They must take urgent steps with regard to those illegal Israeli policies and abandon double standards, so as to preserve the credibility of their role in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Because the Security Council has yet to do that, Israel continues to refuse to implement the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding the need to stop construction and to demolish what has been built of the racist wall of separation that Israel is building on occupied Palestinian land. Israel also continues to refuse to halt the building of settlements on occupied Arab territories and imposes terms on the peace process that are impossible to meet.

Between 2000 and 2007, Israel killed 4,437 Palestinians, of whom 867 were minors. That is in contrast to the 119 Israeli minors killed in the same period. Those figures, provided by an Israeli human rights centre, prove that Israel is a terrorist country that is eight times more violent than the Palestinian resistance, which Israel claims is a source of terrorism against it. We must keep in mind that the Palestinians' firing of rockets was initially a Palestinian reaction to Israel's assassination of Palestinians in Gaza. Given this situation, it is therefore not surprising that former United States President Jimmy Carter and Bishop Desmond Tutu have described Israel as a racist State.

When the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) issues an urgent call for relief, it must be heard by the Security Council as a loud alarm, for it signals a great imbalance in terms of the reaction of the

United Nations, and of the Council in particular, in the face of the tragic situation in Gaza as a result of Israel's criminal actions against the Palestinian people. When hundreds of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and numerous United Nations specialized agencies call for urgent action to save the people of Gaza and the cities of the West Bank under Israeli occupation, it means that there is something wrong in some international moral and political decision-making circles.

There is something wrong, and it is causing more despair, tension, frustration and violence and damaging the prospects for peace. Some might wonder what prompts a certain group to issue one resolution after another on a marginal issue that has nothing to do with the maintenance of international peace and security, while that same group resists any genuine and honest international effort seeking to hold Israel accountable before the Security Council for its criminal practices and its barbaric aggression against the Palestinian people. That aggression is clearly intended to deprive Palestinians of their rights, bring them to their knees and create chasms in their national defences. The only result of such negativity by some parties will be to push the region towards an explosion, to convince the people of the region that resisting Israeli aggression is the only solution and that any talk of a futile peace serves only the continuation of Israeli occupation and aggression.

The current escalating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories can withstand no further silence or disregard on the part of a Security Council that exempts Israel from abiding by the principles of international law. It requires strong intervention in order to put a stop to that exemption and to make Israeli policymakers and decision-makers understand that they are not above the law and that they are accountable for their transgressions, for their worship of violence and for the extremism and racism to which they have fallen prey. Those decision-makers must understand that the continued occupation, over decades, has left the Palestinian people with no other choice but to resist the occupation, through legitimate means guaranteed by international legitimacy and international law.

Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people started decades ago, long before the emergence of the Hamas movement. Throughout that time, Israel has continued its daily assassinations, daily violations, daily arrest campaigns, daily siege, daily starving of the Palestinian people, daily building of settlements and daily provocations.

Anyone who listened to the statement of the Israeli representative would immediately understand that Israel's interpretation of its occupation of the Palestinian territories is unique and without parallel. He believes that the Palestinians must accept the occupation, worship its practices and the oppression it brings and praise the daily assassinations carried out around the clock by Israel. The practices of the Israeli Government against the Palestinian people constitute true terrorism and must be stopped.

The Israeli representative's claim that his country desires peace is not substantiated by Israel's actions, which include settlement-building; the imposition of sieges; assassinations; the building of the wall; the forcible annexation of other people's lands; the closing of crossing points; the cutting off of electricity, water, and supplies of food and medicine; and the arrests of leaders of the Palestinian people and members of their Legislative Council, who have been democratically elected for years. The fruits of true peace and true security must be enjoyed by everyone in the region, not just the Israelis, because peace and security are human rights belonging to all, regardless of colour, religion or race. The right to self-defence too applies to all, including the Palestinians; self-defence cannot be a racist principle tailored to Israeli measurements and the occupation's standards.

The Security Council today is urgently required to take immediate measures to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by the principles of international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, by putting an end to the practice of holding millions of Palestinians hostage to political greed that aims at collectively punishing that people for having made a political choice to reject Israeli occupation.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Al-Allaf (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to extend to you, Sir, and to your brotherly country our congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I extend our thanks to the representative of Italy, Ambassador Spatafora, for his wise management of the work of the Council last month. We would also

like to thank all the members of the Council for their quick response in holding this emergency meeting.

Gaza is currently witnessing a special emergency humanitarian situation, which requires the international community to intervene immediately and deal with it decisively. Any delay will expand the scope of the crisis, double its impact and leave a lasting mark on the entire peace process. Jordan is especially concerned about the dangerous and serious humanitarian situation in Gaza and about the fact that the Gazans' basic daily needs are not being met. We completely reject all policies of collective punishment, which inflict widespread suffering and use it for political purposes.

In response to this tragic situation, His Majesty King Abdullah II has instructed the Jordanian Government to send an immediate contingency relief convoy, in continuance of the policy responsible for hundreds of Jordanian convoys aimed at easing the suffering of the Palestinian people. They are expected to reach Gaza a few hours from now. What is now required from the Israeli Government is that they facilitate the passage of that Jordanian humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people or any other assistance provided by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

However, this is only an immediate humanitarian response. The true response to the situation should be made by the Security Council. We call upon the Council to immediately intervene in order to put an end to this humanitarian tragedy, reverse it and create the necessary conditions to continue the peace process, as agreed upon in Annapolis and underscored in Paris a few weeks ago. We call for nothing less than an immediate end to the military campaign; the lifting of all forms of siege; an end to the policy of collective punishment; the opening of crossing points; enabling all United Nations agencies to do their jobs; access for emergency relief and humanitarian materials; resumption of water, electricity, food and fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip; and the reopening of the power plants. The real challenge before the Council today is to try to contain the situation and to provide the necessary conditions for a return to the negotiation table.

Our ultimate objective should always be present before us: to bring about an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State before the end of this year, in accordance with what was agreed on at the Annapolis Conference and with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Mahmassani (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to associate myself with the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of Arab States, the representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

I congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and commend your wise leadership of the Council's proceedings. I also pay tribute to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Italy, for his distinguished leadership of the Council last month. I also thank you deeply, Sir, for responding promptly to the Arab request to convene this meeting.

The dangerous and deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip, requires the Security Council — the principal body tasked with the maintenance of international peace and security — to take immediate action to put an end to the Israeli aggression, particularly in the Gaza Strip, and to compel Israel to lift the siege of Gaza and open the border crossing points to allow for the entry of humanitarian and relief supplies, protect civilians and guarantee their rights under international law. The Council must also request the Secretary-General to submit an urgent report to the Security Council on Israeli practices that are violations of all international laws and norms with respect to the residents of the occupied Palestinian territories.

We further ask the Security Council to conduct an international investigation into Israel's inhuman crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Gaza, and to declare the Gaza Strip a disaster area, which would trigger an urgent call on the international community to extend support and assistance to the besieged Palestinian people. Moreover, we ask the Council to consider Israel's decision to declare the Gaza Strip a hostile entity to be illegal and illegitimate.

The League of Arab States expresses its deep concern over the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories as a result of the ongoing and grave Israeli

violations against Palestinian citizens. The Palestinian economy is at the point of total collapse due to the noose-tightening practiced by Israel, the occupying Power, forcing many Palestinian families to live hand to mouth, barely surviving and deprived of the minimum necessities of a dignified life and of infrastructure, education and health services.

The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Gaza Strip in particular, is the cause of increasing social and economic suffering among Palestinians because the continuous military operations of the occupier against the occupied territories rely also on the weapons of forcible land seizure, the demolition of homes, the razing of agricultural lands, the imposition of harsh restrictions on transportation and movement, and the policy of closures, which is deemed to be the principal cause of the poverty and humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel has thereby completely flouted all international and humanitarian laws, norms and values, human rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in time of war.

The situation has reached the point at which even the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is unable to deliver humanitarian and relief assistance to the Gaza Strip because of the comprehensive Israeli closures of all entry points. That will precipitate an unprecedented, Israeli-made humanitarian disaster in the region that will have severe consequences.

Israel's practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip, are jeopardizing the prospects of peace in the region and threatening the outcomes of the Annapolis conference. Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories is the principal cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the settlement of which can be achieved only through negotiations between the parties to end the occupation and enable the Palestinian people to establish their own State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of resolutions of international legitimacy, international law and the Arab peace initiative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Israel has asked to speak a second time. I give him the floor.

Mr. Cohen (Israel): Thank you, Sir, for allowing my delegation the opportunity to address the Council once again.

The Hamas terrorist organization that operates in the Gaza Strip and is responsible for the current situation facing the Palestinian people did not materialize out of thin air. Hamas — like other terrorist organizations, for that matter — is supported, financed and backed by States in the region, such as Syria, in violation of their obligations under international law and, in particular, Security Council resolution 1373 (2001).

It is hence the height of hypocrisy, cynicism and indecency for the representative of Syria to address the Council and condemn Israel merely for defending itself against the very Hamas terrorists that it supports. Damascus is home and headquarters to numerous terrorist organizations, including Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Khaled Mashal, the political leader of the latter, lives there while continuing to orchestrate the killing of Israelis. Israel urges all States to end their support for terrorists and terrorism, in accordance with international law.

It is deeply regrettable that, during its statement this morning, one State member of the Security Council utilized the term "genocide" to refer to the situation in the Gaza Strip. It is highly insensitive to the survivors of genocide around the world and to the sensibilities of this Council for language to be used so cheaply. My delegation urges Member States to be more responsible with the language used in their statements.

Lastly, it is astonishing, though perhaps not surprising, that some delegations that addressed the Council today were able to refer to the situation in the Gaza Strip through a one-sided prism, without any understanding of the true causes of the situation. The absence of reference to Hamas is validation of the fact that the deliberations in this Chamber are often all too detached from the reality on the ground.

I reiterate Israel's commitment to facilitating the necessary humanitarian aid to the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip. The current situation that Israel faces is the same challenge that every democracy confronts when dealing with terrorism — to uphold the standards of international law even while the terrorists it fights wilfully violate those norms.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Syria has asked to speak a second time. I give him the floor.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I regret that I have been compelled to speak before the Council once again at this very late hour.

The representatives of Israel in all international forums have yet to understand that the story of the military occupation of Arab territory and the deprivation of the Palestinian people of their usurped inherent rights is one that is well known. It is so well known, in fact, that even Israeli non-governmental organizations have begun to contribute effectively to bringing Israel's inhuman practices against the unarmed Palestinian population to light.

The play of shedding crocodile tears in the Security Council because of the violence of Palestinians — who have nothing more than stones to face the arsenal of Israeli aggression on Palestinian territory — has become raw, boring, unnecessary and incapable of allowing the light of truth to shine before the members of the Council.

Israeli State terrorism in our region began with the inception of Israel in historical Palestine in 1948. This Israeli terrorism, as the Council knows, has fallen on representatives of international legitimacy such as Count Bernadotte, who was killed by a terrorist explosion carried out by a previous Prime Minister of Israel targeting him. That terrorist activity has repeatedly fallen on the UNIFIL forces and has killed thousands of children in massacres perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces for decades in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. On this occasion, I wish to remind members of the Council that the first hijacking of a civilian aircraft in the world was carried out by Israel against a Syrian aircraft in 1954. I also wish to remind members of the Council that Israel shot down a Libyan civilian aircraft in 1971.

Peace will not prevail in the Middle East except when the representatives of Israel understand that peace is in their interest before it is in ours. Peace is not of interest to the Arab world alone. When Israel understands that peace is also an Israeli need, before it is an Arab and a Palestinian need, then peace will prevail. Then the Council's job will be much easier than it is at present.

The Arab States have not invited millions of Palestinian refugees to reside in the Arab States; those millions of refugees, who live in dozens and hundreds of refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and inside Palestine itself, have been forcibly displaced from their homeland. Syria did not invite Khaled Meshal to come to Damascus. Lebanon did not invite half a million refugees to live in its land. They all wish to return today, before tomorrow, to their homeland, on the basis of a resolution adopted by international legitimacy, General Assembly resolution 194 (III) — the resolution on the right of return.

Those millions of Palestinian refugees who live in exile are waiting to return to their homeland. Their homeland is Palestine. It is on the map, and everybody knows where Palestine is. The representative of Israel here, or in any other international forum, will not stop us from seeing that truth: the terms of reference of international law. This Council is here to protect and defend the law not to allow Israel to become an exception to international law and its provisions.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no more speakers inscribed on my list. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite members of the Council to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.